

COMMENTARY

CAN WE NEGOTIATE A SETTLEMENT NOW?

Armchair Strategy vs. Political Reality

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THE less freedom of choice we have in a situation, the more tempted we are to indulge in exercises of intellectual evasion. When a glance at the world shows us conflicts that are probably insoluble, at least in our own time—like that between Russia and the free West—then why not offer a few new ideas to the people in “control”?—at worst, they can only prove to

How should the West react to present and forthcoming Soviet offers for a settlement of outstanding issues? According to some acute political analysts, recent months have witnessed a significant change in Soviet foreign policy, with the Kremlin seeking for the present a “peaceful coexistence” with the West. It is in these terms, at any rate, that the Soviet proposal for a united, neutral, and (at least nominally) rearmed Germany is being widely interpreted. Other political analysts remain skeptical. Has there really been, they ask, a new turn in Communist policy? Does Stalin, for his own reasons, genuinely desire to negotiate his outstanding differences with the Western powers? What are his real “terms”? These questions are dealt with in this article by RAYMOND ARON and the one following by Boris Meissner. M. Aron, one of the outstanding political thinkers in contemporary France, is a regular contributor to the newspaper *Figaro*, as well as to leading periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic. He is the author of several important books, one of which, *The Century of Total Wars*, will be published in English this fall by Doubleday. The present article was translated from the French by Waldemar Hansen.

be impractical or innocuous. There is no more glaring contrast, at the present moment, than that between the unrelenting grip of events in which our statesmen wriggle, and the thousand and one solutions offered by armchair strategists.

It is true that criticism by a minority can at times alter a situation, though only if it is brought to bear at a given favorable moment; so abstractly, it is conceivable that a fresh approach might improve our chances of defeating Communism without a third world war. The hitch is that most of the policies tirelessly proposed, in America and especially Europe, by this or that clique of intellectuals and publicists, can always be traced back to some unrealistic basic premise. To assume, for example, a Soviet Union with limited aspirations, one that would refrain from encouraging any action by the Communist parties in Western Europe, and would desire a permanent, peaceful coexistence—to assume this, in disregard of facts and experiences, immediately renders valueless any criticism of present policy toward the real Soviet Union.

Yet a legitimate question remains: have we, Americans or Europeans, a strategy that allows for alternatives, or is our task simply to carry out more effectively the strategy imposed upon us by the brute facts of political life today?

IT is cruelly difficult to bear the tension of a cold war. There is universal longing for some pacific policy capable of obviating the violence whose proportions loom so frighteningly before us.

Here in Europe, the argument most frequently heard in line with this feeling is the one set forth a year ago by certain editors of the left-wing Catholic magazine *Esprit* in a special number (March 1951): the best way of handling an explosive situation is by "separating" those whose friction might touch it off. In other words, Europe, by regaining a certain independence vis-à-vis the United States, would be a force for peace; whereas the Atlantic Pact, which aims to draw the coalition of Western powers closer together, can only intensify the Kremlin's fears and increase the danger of a third world war. This line of thought takes it for granted that both the great powers are equally responsible for the present world situation; that both are equally undesirous of a war, but that each, if left to its own designs, natural impulses, or fears, is equally likely to end up by unleashing one; and that the countries in the middle should therefore do the two brainless giants the favor of keeping them apart.

These assumptions reveal a downright ignorance matched only by the irritating self-assurance with which they are made. What would be the upshot of the measures proposed? Would cutting Western Europe off from an American-led "Western bloc," and thereby creating a military void, lessen the tensions making for war? A minimum of reflection would show the silliness of this. Conceding that the Politburo's conduct can be explained solely in terms of fear (an explanation that I do not for one moment accept), it is the United States alone whom Moscow fears, not France or Great Britain. Sporadic assertions of French or British independence, or a clear-cut demonstration of British or French impotence, would scarcely reassure the Stalinists (assuming, once again, that they were in need of this), while to accept in advance a Soviet occupation in the event of war could only increase the demoralization of Europe and make it all the more

vulnerable to Communist pressure. At the same time, such gestures would frighten American policy-makers, who rightly believe that a non-Sovietized Western Europe is indispensable to the security of their country, and would alienate American opinion in general.

As for European *armed* neutrality, it would be just as unavailing. Western Europe under present conditions is incapable of making even a second-rate show of arms; and to become capable, as a *neutral*, of that much of a show in the near future it would have to submit to German hegemony, a prospect which most Europeans would probably regard as worse than an American Europe.

IF, BY itself, Western Europe cannot "resume the dialogue between East and West" or "resolve the crisis," does there not remain the possibility that a different policy on America's part might be capable of leading to a solution? The United States, we frequently hear it said, could—if it wished—negotiate with the Kremlin, either with an eye to a stable partitioning of the world, or to effect local settlements of quarrels in Europe and in Asia. In order to test this thesis, it is necessary to look at the principal theaters in which the cold war is taking place right now.

In the Near East, where the nationalism of the Arab countries keeps creating difficulties for Great Britain and, indirectly, for all the other Western powers, why should the Stalinists stop inciting revolt? Communist agents swarm like flies all over that area; they do not advertise their presence, but are only too eager, for instance, to see British troops in the Suez Canal Zone become the targets of xenophobic passion. How could discussions over this area even begin? Stalin would testify openly that he had neither ambitions nor responsibilities in that part of the world, and that, as a friend of all the oppressed, he limited himself, from his lofty throne above the battle, simply to wishing victory to the "anti-imperialist forces."

As for the war in Korea, it would be perfectly possible to end it by compromise with-

in the framework of *present* policy, and this could have been done long ago if the Kremlin, for reasons best known to itself, had not stalled negotiations (as, for example, in insisting that Russia be a "neutral" observer of the fulfilment of the armistice terms). So long as Stalin is afraid of a third world war, he will hesitate to send too many of his planes and tanks against the American forces in Korea, and without that a decisive Communist victory there is impossible. In the absence of a victory on either side, the prolongation of the struggle is not excluded: it is always difficult to negotiate an armistice, especially when the negotiators are convinced in advance of the bad faith of their opponents. Yet a local compromise seems, nevertheless, a quite possible solution.

As for China, we could speculate till doomsday about what might have happened if the American government had recognized Peking at the same time that it was deciding to intervene in Korea, or what might have happened if United Nations troops had not crossed the 38th Parallel. But the orthodox Stalinism of Mao Tse-tung and his disciples makes it likely that the West could not have escaped the hostility of Communist China in any event. To appease this hostility, America would probably have to do more than liquidate Chiang Kai-shek's regime and surrender Formosa. A Communist government in Peking has a double motive for attacking Western strongholds in Southeast Asia: a powerful China has often in the past exercised or desired to exercise a protectorate over Tonkin, Annam, and Burma; and a revolutionary China must spread the anti-imperialist revolt wherever the West still has a foothold. Why put an end to undeclared wars in Malaya and Indo-China which, while so costly to the British and the French, cost nothing, or at most a drop in the bucket, to those who pull the strings in Moscow and Peking?

UNDER such conditions, what would be on the agenda of eventual negotiations for an over-all settlement in Asia? The Soviets would insist adamantly on certain conces-

sions—the liquidation of Chiang's forces, the handing over of Formosa, Communist China's entry into the United Nations. Of what use would it be to ask them to stop supporting revolutionaries in Malaya, in Burma, or in Indo-China? Thirty years of experience have taught us that in these matters promises may be given but are never kept—for the Soviet regime is not merely another great power, but a power rooted in an aggressive ideology. We can dispense with all fancy guesswork about the psychology of Stalin and his disciples: the ideological character of Soviet imperialism is adequately exposed by a simple examination of the facts, i.e., the progressive Sovietization of all the territories under its rule and the "Stalinization" of the structure and activities of the Communist parties elsewhere. Whether the Politburo runs its enterprise cynically, employing doctrines without believing in them, or whether it is actually fanatic, believing that the Communist party is the executor of the will of history, the danger for the West remains more or less the same, and the West still has to come up with an answer.

Most observers would agree, of course, that the West's policy in Asia is open to criticism. In Indo-China, France has had a vacillating policy for years, and it might perhaps have been better for her to throw in the sponge at the very beginning rather than go on fighting a war that could only drain away French strength. The United States should certainly have made a definite choice between resolute support of Chiang and open abstention; she has only increased her difficulties by advertising an ineffectual alliance with him. But having fully acknowledged these past mistakes, what can we do today?

In Indo-China, withdrawal may perhaps become inevitable if Chinese "volunteers" intervene to repeat the Korean pattern. When one's own forces are dangerously limited, it is only reasonable to economize by limiting marginal wars and areas of friction. But in terms of the present question of how to avoid slipping from a cold into a "hot" war, such measures as the surrender of Burma, Siam,

and Malaya would have obviously tragic consequences. Belief in the irresistible power of Communism would spread still further in Japan and Asia, and certain sources of raw materials would be lost, without the West having the least guarantee that its withdrawal would assure safer positions: after the loss of the Indo-Chinese peninsula, Indonesia and India would come under fire.

The point here is not to discuss in detail all the global decisions that may have to be made, but to discover whether negotiations with Moscow would avail in any way to bring about a *substantial* change in the present situation in Asia, or check the developments we fear there. The West still has a certain freedom to choose between its present policy and some other one that would seek to appease Communist China's demands by abandoning certain marginal areas whose defense is, in any case, too costly. But any decisions on the specific questions connected with this latter choice would be made in Washington, London, or Paris, and scarcely call for negotiations with Moscow. It would actually make matters worse to mask a retreat by appealing to Moscow and Peking for promises: American public opinion would react violently when the new "promises" were broken, as they inevitably would be. Better to make the public understand that in a cold war, just as in an all-out one, no god guarantees that fortune will always smile on you, and retreat in the face of superior force—when necessary—is contrary to the laws neither of war nor of reason.

ASIA's problem is essentially a *revolutionary* one, whereas Europe's, notwithstanding that the struggle against Communism is largely psychological and political, is essentially *military*. Communism can perhaps spread indefinitely throughout Asia by guerrilla warfare. But in Europe no Communist party, however strong, is capable of seizing power west of the Iron Curtain without the aid of the Red Army. That army's presence in the heart of Europe, less than a hundred miles from the Rhine, is the cause of the great fear holding Europe like a vise these

past six years. Is there a chance, then, to resolve the European crisis by negotiation?

The frontiers of Stalin's empire are already advanced dangerously close to the West by the Sovietization of all the little and middle-sized countries between Germany and Russia—Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia. But the Sovietization of the Eastern Zone of Germany has quite another implication. Germany is the essential stake of the cold war in Europe: the possibility or the impossibility, the usefulness or the purposelessness of negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States (or the whole of the free world) depend on the outcome of any discussions on Germany.

Two solutions are conceivable at present: either the status quo, i.e., the continued partition of Germany; or else the reuniting of the Reich, with the Big Four coming to terms on the question of her indefinite disarmament or—what comes to the same thing—her merely nominal rearmament.

This last solution has a seductive charm for many Europeans who tremble at the prospect of German rearmament, both because of the possible Soviet reaction and the possible revival of Prussian militarism. And it would probably be tactful for the West not to respond too negatively to the recent Soviet note; the Germans should be convinced that the West is not responsible for the division of the Reich, and it always helps to call the Kremlin's bluffs. But whatever the exigencies of tact, the chances of an accord on Germany between the Soviets and the West seem, at the present moment, extremely feeble.

It is doubtful that the Soviet authorities envisage really free elections in the Eastern Zone of Germany, which is already 80 per cent Sovietized, has the nucleus of a German Red Army in the *Bereitschaften* (which number about 60,000), and has begun to build an air force. Is it credible that the Stalinists would permit a free election that would give the lie to results of recent and unanimous ones? Moreover, how could voters in a country governed by police methods

be assured that they were free to vote against their masters without danger? We know that the Soviet concept of liberty is very different from the Western. Is it not likely that under "free" elections the Soviet authorities envisage the division of the Socialist Unity party into Communist and "socialist" parties, with the last headed by Herr Grotewohl?

Even assuming that these obstacles disappeared and agreement is reached on the conditions for genuinely free elections throughout Germany, what concessions would Stalin demand in return? From the Russian notes, it is clear that the Kremlin hopes to see quadripartite control established over all of Germany "in conformity with the Potsdam agreement"—to mention the formula which the Russians will surely cite. If the Allies, with the experience of Austria in mind, say that they will not return to Potsdam, the Russians will probably propose the simultaneous evacuation of all German territory by all four powers, thus creating a situation analogous to that of Korea, with the *Bereitschaften* ready to play the role of the North Korean divisions. A virtually defenseless Germany in the heart of Europe could not be considered by either the East or the West as a definitive solution. The Russians would see it as a step towards the inclusion of Germany in the Soviet sphere; the West would regard it as an advance towards the East and a step towards the integration of all Germany in the Atlantic Pact. For the disarmament of a unified Germany to be enduring, Russia would have to cease acting as an expansionist empire, content herself once and for all with what she has now, and stop the propaganda of the Communist parties in Germany, France, and Italy—all of which are absurd assumptions, and remain so no matter how we define the character of the Communist system. If it is a system governed by fanatics the absurdity is obvious. If it is one governed by an elite of cynical realists, then it would be foolish to ask them to surrender the ideology that furnishes the rationale of their power and assures it even now a considerable measure of prestige in critical areas of the world.

Two objections can be raised to my analysis. First, it might be said that no particular act of negotiation could change the international scene overnight, but that the partial success of one conference and then of another might bring about this result gradually. Second, it might also be said that comprehensive negotiations on a worldwide scale, between the two great powers, could pave the way for fruitful bargaining and, indeed, for a temporary stabilization of the international scene.

There can be no quarrel with the first objection. It is indeed possible that, as a result of negotiations, the atmosphere might become less strained, and the West might come at the same time to understand the permanent obligations of the cold war and accept the idea that it may go on for years. If the Korean war can be brought to an end by compromise, so much the better. If an agreement can be reached on a peace treaty for Austria, fine. But it must be pointed out that negotiation over specific outstanding issues, and resultant compromise, would not mark an innovation in the present strategy of the West: it is an essential aspect of that strategy—as of the East's too. But we ought to have learned by now not to have any illusions about the likely fruits of such negotiations.

There remains the question of a comprehensive negotiated settlement of all conflicts. Such negotiations would call for a good measure of secrecy and few participants—preferably only the United States and the Soviet Union. It would be much, much easier if the governments in Washington and Moscow were more alike. On the day that Stalin wants to give himself a breathing spell, he will no doubt prefer a single interlocutor with the power to make decisions. The Hitler-Stalin pact would have had a better chance of survival, if it had been up to Stalin alone, than the Yalta agreement. To the Russians, the noise in Washington, on the other hand, is as hypocritical as it is deafening.

The American regime being what it is, is wholesale bargaining possible? Let us agree

that it is conceivable. One can even imagine among possible decisions: surrender of the Western zones of Berlin in return for the evacuation of Austria by the Red Army; the end of the Korean war; even a promise of Chinese non-intervention in Burma and Indo-China, for which the West would hand over Formosa and allow Peking a seat in the United Nations. But conceivable though it might be, such a settlement would be the height of folly. In Europe, it would mean that the West would publicly ratify the Sovietization of East Europe, without receiving any concession other than a promise of non-intervention in the sphere of Western influence—a promise that would not be kept. In Asia, it would mean that the West would surrender material advantages in exchange for spurious assurances. Such a world settlement would be a swindle for the Western powers.

It cannot be proved that an all-out victory—that is, the destruction of the Stalinist world conspiracy—is possible without total warfare. The conclusion to be drawn, it seems to me, is that it would be fatal to set oneself such an objective. When world power is divided between two states, the only recourse short of a struggle to the death is the partitioning of the world. But the idea that this partitioning has still to be negotiated is fantastic: *it is already in existence*. The partition is imperfect because the two powers rub up against each other in certain sensitive sectors, because the Soviet faction is present and active in the very heart of the West's sphere of influence, because the Soviet Union wages war along unorthodox lines. But how could negotiations put an end to all this? At most, negotiations might settle certain frontier disputes (Berlin, Korea), and are to this extent desirable. No negotiation, on the other hand, can prevent

the collapse of colonial rule in the Near East, or the semi-military advance of Communism in the Far East, or the weakening of Western Europe through the activities of Communist parties.

The nature of the Soviet regime, the fact of its being a great power that is the capital of an aggressive secular religion, obliges the partitioning of the world to take on, in our century, the guise of cold war. It does not follow that its religion will inevitably drive the Kremlin into all-out war. The Communist rulers do not let ideology stand in the way of making short-term agreements with countries that are resolutely anti-Communist—as in the case of Kemal's Turkey or Hitler's Germany. Far from preferring negotiations with socialists or liberals, the Stalinists prefer to do business with those whom they regard as their declared enemies. Outlawing a Communist party does not seem to be a bad start towards a treaty with the Kremlin!

The illusion, one is tempted to say the naivety, is to think that the partitioning of the world will one day be negotiated secretly, in some interview at Yalta or elsewhere, while in fact it is daily being lived out among us, and will be "stabilized" only at the end of the cold war itself. How long will the cold war last? It is futile to speculate. Perhaps the Soviet regime will be radically changed after Stalin's death. Perhaps there will be a break between Moscow and Peking. Perhaps—and perhaps not. We must act as if none of these happy events was going to happen in the near future—yet we must never forget that history will always have some surprises ready for us. We can only be manly about our ignorance, carrying on the daily struggle without illusions and, if possible, without anguish, sensitive to the limits of any course of action and to the virtues of patience.